

## COMPARATIVE ASSESSMENT OF SAFETY CLIMATE OF CASUAL AND PERMANENT CONSTRUCTION WORKERS IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *The use of flexible work arrangement outside the array of standard work arrangement has been linked to high rate of accidents on construction sites and unsafe behaviours. To this end, this study examines and compares the safety climate of casual and permanent construction workers with a view to ascertaining if there is any disparity in their responses to safety issues on site, the causes and the implications on the industry and society as a whole. The study was a survey research. The respondents were site operatives which were randomly selected from 80 construction sites across the South East Nigeria. A total of 861 questionnaires were duly completed, returned and found suitable for analysis out of 1200 issued, representing a response rate of 71.75%. The data collected were statistically analyzed using ONE WAY ANOVA at 5% (0.05) significance level. The study established that there is significant disparity in the safety behaviours of casual and permanent construction workers on sites due to perceived difference in the level of organizations' safety obligations in terms of management commitment, workers involvement and safety education and training which arises due workers' job nomenclature . It recommended a holistic readjustment in the employment system to close the gaps between casual employers and full time employers in terms of management commitment, workers involvement, education and training, welfare benefits, basic salary, working condition, etc (equal treatments) as its being practiced in New Zealand through the labour loading.*

**KEYWORDS:** Casual, Construction Workers, Flexible Work, Labour Loading, Permanent, Safety Climate

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### INTRODUCTION

The use of flexible work arrangement outside the purview of standard work arrangement has been linked to high rate of accidents on construction sites (Fellow, Langford, Newcombe & Umy, 2002; Quinlan, 2003). This situation if not properly managed is capable of shattering already distorted safety image of construction industry. The rate at which construction workers have continued to exhibit unsafe attitude and behaviour at site irrespective of numerous efforts the industry is making towards establishing an enduring safety culture calls for a serious rethink. The introduction of flexible work arrangement into the system of employment as a result of industry restructuring, labour market flexibility and deregulation (Miraftab, 2004; Foote, 2004; Shin & McGrath-Champ, 2006; Bodibe, 2006; Well & Jason, 2010), also seems to have aggravated the situation. Fapohunda (2012) notes the traditional industrial relation system based on the concept of full-time employees working within an enterprise is increasingly being challenged by the use of nonstandard work arrangement (NSWA) by employers. Similarly, Wandera (2011) observes that the use of temporary workers is growing

rapidly and has spread across industries—from manufacturing to services and other occupations, including construction workers, registered nurses, bankers, information technologists. O'Higgins (2010) also observes that this system of employment has spread across the European Union, Canada and United States as a measure for labour market recovery due to the impact of economic and financial crises on youth unemployment.

In Nigerian, Anugwom (2007) attributes this growth to the vulnerability of employees in Nigeria, occasioned by high level of unemployment and accompanying poverty. The question however, is whether the quest to achieve a sustainable construction and development is realizable given the magnitude of impacts this kind of employment system has on the overall well being of the construction industry. In the same vein, the system negates the principles of quality of work life. Moreover, Laplagne, Glover and Fry (2005) argue that the rise in the proportion of workers and firms involved in flexible form of employment such as hire labour has led to concerns about the implications of this expansion for the job security, job safety and job satisfaction of Australian workers. Quinlan (2003) contends that a substantial body of international research indicated that in many instances flexible work arrangements such as temporary and home-based work, the use of subcontractors/outsourcing and increased job insecurity resulting from downsizing is associated with inferior outcomes in terms of worker safety, health and well-being. It is also becoming increasingly clear that a number of the work arrangements and organizational changes just described pose a significant problem for Occupational Health and Safety regulators and those administering workers compensation/rehabilitation regimes. It is worrisome that a number of researches have been done in the area of labour casualization both in the developed and developing countries including Nigeria without adequately addressing the situation at hand. Majority of these studies focused on the effects of casualization on productivity, organization performance, workers welfare and economy, motivation, labour utilization, unemployment, and skill shortages (Mitullah & Wachira, 2003; Quinlan, 2003; Forde & MacKenzie, 2005; Bodibe, 2006; Hamilton, 2006; Shin & McGrath-Champ, 2006; Anugwom, 2007; Well & Jason, 2010; Ibronke, Adedokun & Hungbo, 2011; Wandera, 2011); or on other sectors of the Nigerian economy other than the construction industry (Adeleye, 2011; Danesi, 2011; Fapohunda, 2012; Okafor, 2012), while little or none have been done to ascertain and compare the safety climate of casual and permanent construction workers in Nigeria. The recent review on the use of casual work by Kalejaiye (2014) indicates that the use of casual work in Nigeria is still on the increase due to its perceived benefits. The above scenarios and increasing unemployment in Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012; Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), 2011; Akinyemi, Ofem & Ikuenomore, 2012;) however, formed the thrust of this current research and the outcome of this research will form a strong base for stakeholders' decision to continue engaging casual workers for construction works in Nigeria.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The basis of this research is on the following understated hypotheses.

#### **Hypothesis one:**

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is no significant difference in the level of organizations' safety obligations to casual and permanent construction workers.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is significant difference in the level of organizations' safety obligations to casual and permanent construction workers.

### **Hypothesis two:**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant disparity in the safety behaviours of casual and permanent construction workers on sites.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is significant disparity in the safety behaviours of casual and permanent construction workers on sites.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Flexible Work Arrangement and its Implications**

Grimshaw, *et al.* (2008) observes that recent changes to organizational context associated with economic restructuring have resulted in a dismantling of the traditional labour market as organizations 'delayer' and 'downsize', resulting in a dislocation of workers from traditional career paths and limited access to training and development. The effects of these changes are unthinkable in the sense that according to Nicholls (2006), the changes resulted in the wholesale loss of the tradition of permanent positions, with production staff increasingly working on short-term contracts from weeks to months in duration, always mindful of how to obtain the next package of work. Okafor (2007) also reveals that some work organizations resorted to unethical business practices like casualization of workers thereby hurting workers interest and violating some fundamental labour laws. As a driving force to casualization, neo-liberalism tends to deregulates markets including the labour market to increase labour flexibility. It is widely acknowledged that labour market flexibility is a subject of great controversy. Flexible work arrangements have different connotations that reflect the same concept. According to Campbell (2004), their definitions are often a source of confusion and controversy because it is marked by tension between vernacular, regulatory and contractual meanings. Available literatures have preferred using different terms for this same concept, (e.g. contract, contingent, casual, irregular, non-standard, atypical, non-core, temporary, part-time, flexible, hire labour, subcontracting, fixed term, short term, etc) (Wooden & Hawke, 1998; Quinlan, 2003; Australian Industry Group (AIG), 2005; Hamilton, 2006). Cheadle (2006) identifies and categorizes three kinds of flexibility:

- **Employment flexibility** (the freedom to determine employment levels quickly and cheaply),
- **Wage flexibility** (the freedom to alter wage level without restraint),
- **Functional flexibility** (the freedom to alter work processes, terms and conditions of employment, etc and cheaply) upon which increase in adoption of casual employment is based.

Based on this, Reilly (1998) avers that flexibility of labour is reflected in an employer's ability to: recruit or dispose of labour as required; alter labour costs in line with market needs; allocate labour efficiently within the firm; and fix working hours to suit business requirements. Fleetwood (2007) argues that in the context of the employment relationship flexibility is for the employer and of the employee, and subsequently, whilst there are undeniable benefits for labour from certain forms of flexibility – where there are mutual gains to be had from both parties – flexibility cannot be seen as unequivocally good from an employee perspective.

Increasingly, casual employees are filling positions that are permanent in nature and behind employee vulnerability; the high levels of unemployment and accompanying poverty are the most driving force in Africa (Bodibe, 2006; Anugwon, 2007; Okafor, 2012). Wandera (2011) posits that the three main reasons for employers to use short term workers are flexibility of staff, reduction of cost and ease of dismissal. On his part, Jauch (2010) notes that global experiences have shown that employers use labour hire workers for a variety of reasons, which include coping with peaks in demand, reducing costs, avoiding industrial relations problems, greater flexibility, as well as avoiding retrenchment procedures and trade unions. Globalization, technological change and abundance of labour supply are also mentioned as reasons for casualization (Fapohunda, 2012). In addition, Brennan, et al. (2003 cited in Laplagne, *et al.* 2005) contends that the firms' main reasons for using labour hire include among others:

- Source additional staff;
- Replace temporarily absent employees;
- Outsource the administrative burden of employment;
- Achieve thorough recruitment; and
- Overcome skill shortages.

Contending, this form of employment is characterized by job insecurity, low wages and substandard working conditions, limited training and skills development and low levels of unionization, job dissatisfaction, low level of sense of belonging, unscheduled turnover, low morale, low level of productivity, dehumanization of work and workers, lack of employment benefits that accrue to regular employee, promotion as well as right to organize and collective bargaining (Wooden & Hawke, 1998; Pocock, Buchanan & Campbell, 2004; Jauch, 2010; Wandera, 2011). In the same vein, Laplagne, *et al.* (2005) argues that the labour hire work arrangement may be deficient in terms of:

- Training, promotion, human capital investment, and career prospects;
- Occupational health and safety and workers' compensation and rehabilitation; and
- Job security and workers' remuneration and entitlements.

While Majid (2012) submits that the work of non-regularly employed workers is characterized not only by low income (as we have seen earlier) but by variability in the intensity as well as timing of labour use over the production cycle by individual workers in this category, Hall (2002), argues that the key challenge in casual employment is not simply to rectify problem experienced by individual casual worker, rather the problem is the processes of casualization itself. He then maintains that the significance of casualization is that it is integral to labour management strategies that achieve better deployment, and not development of labour.

It is against the above backdrop that this paper assesses whether there is any difference in the safety behaviour and perception of construction workers as a result of difference in their employment arrangement or categorization. The result of this study will suggest strategic actions that could be applied to minimize the effects of the discrepancy in work arrangements and at the same time reduce the accident rate on construction sites.

**Flexible Work Arrangement in Nigerian Construction Industry**

The use of any form of flexible work arrangement is not new even in the developing countries like Nigeria (Hamilton, 2006; Okafor, 2007; Danesi, 2011). But the rate at which this trend is growing and substituting almost all permanent job positions in every sector of our economy including the construction sector is greatly worrisome. Although the exact origin of casualization in Nigeria is not clear, Fashoyin (2000), Alozie (2009), Adeleye, (2011), Danesi, (2011), Fapohunda (2012) and Okafor (2012) traced the emergence of casualization in Nigeria's labour market to the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP) in 1986 as well as adoption of International Monetary Fund (IMF) directives and World Bank loans. According to Fapohunda (2012) the combination of these factors led to a slump in the economy. Many factories shut down, some operating below minimum capacity and many organizations found it difficult to compete in the globalized economy which is tilted more in favour of the developed economies. While Alozie (2009) argues that the resultant of the policy was unprecedented retrenchment of workers in the public sector which created a large scale of unemployment, globalization and trade liberalization added to competition from imported goods, Fapohunda (2012) surmises that it forced enterprises in Nigeria to reduce their staff strength and replace them with contract and casual workers in order to cut costs of production and remain competitive.

Although the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was geared toward less government involvement in the economy and more private sector participation, the revitalization of the private sector was aimed at attracting the much needed Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) into the country. While it attracted some FDI almost in all sectors of the nation's economy, it has led to the lowering of labour standards at the same time. Mitullah and Wachira (2003) observe that under the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) which began in the late eighties government development expenditure was heavily curtailed as part of the austerity measures required by the donors. Investment in buildings was particularly affected, as evidenced by the numerous stalled projects that have remained unfinished for over ten years and the public sector was no longer a major client in the building sub-sector.

In Nigeria construction industry, this trend of employment practice is more pronounced. The fact being that virtually all construction workers are casual or contract workers. It cuts across all categories of the industry (from small to large organizations, indigenous to multinational organizations), and also all categories of workforce (from unskilled to highly skilled, uneducated to highly educated). Worse still, we have a situation where we have permanent casual or contract workers. This is a situation where a worker is employed under casual or contract arrangement and remains in the same organization for a very long time while his agreement is being renewed every year without any improvement. Danesi (2011) attributes this anomaly to defects in the existing labour laws and government policies. She argues that the current labour laws and government policies do not create a legal framework for casual and contract workers in Nigeria hence their exploitation and denial of the right to organize by employers. Consequently, Fellow, Langford, Newcombe and Umy (2002) link the casual nature of employment in construction industry to one of the causes of construction site accidents. It has also been established that organizational safety climate influences the safety behaviour of workers (AIG, 2005; Che Hassan, Basha & Wan Hanafi, 2007; Mearns & Yule, 2009; Sadullah & Kantan, 2009). With this scenario in place, it is pertinent to examine the behavior of construction workers with respect to safety.

### **Flexible Work Arrangement and Workers Safety Climate**

Within organizations, the nature of the work carried out by individuals and what they feel about it is governed by the employment relationship and the psychological contract (Armstrong, 2009). It is however, disheartening that vast majority of Nigerian construction workers are engaged and treated as casual. In response to this, the workers equally see themselves as casual and not being integral part of whatever organization that employs them. This situation is unhealthy and influences the workers perceptions and behaviours. It also negates the tenets of Quality of Work Life. Walters (2010) argues that workers participation and consultation has significant role in managing the health and safety of construction industry. While Quality of Work Life is described as the favourable working environment that supports and promotes satisfaction by providing employees with rewards, job security, career growth opportunities, etc (Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy 2013), Che Rose et al. (2006) argue that Quality of Work Life is a comprehensive construct that includes an individual's job related wellbeing and the extent to which work experiences are rewarding, fulfilling and devoid of stress and other negative personal consequences. The elements that are relevant to an individual's quality of work life include the task, the physical work environment, social environment within the organization, administrative system and relationship between life on and off the job.

Since safety climate is a manifestation of safety culture, Okolie and Okoye (2012) state that the overall safety culture can be described as a set of beliefs, norms, attitudes and social technical practices that are concerned with minimizing the exposure of individuals within and beyond an organization, to conditions considered dangerous or injurious. A critical look at the principles of good safety climate will conform to the tenet of good quality of work life. To this end, Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2013) affirm that good quality of work life is necessary for an organization to attract and to retain skilled and talented employees. They maintain that in order to survive in the competitive market because of liberalization, privatization and globalization and to minimize the attrition rate of employees the Quality of Work Life initiatives are very important. Because, Okoye (2010) adduces that casualization of construction work and temporary nature of employment in construction industry contributes to low level of safety training and education of construction worker and it's also associated with low level of management commitment to safety training of workers and safety commitment. He further argues that workers are not usually moved by their inner desire to observe safety rules on site but needed to be persuaded before they can maintain and abide by the rule. Based on this, Okolie and Okoye (2012) suggest that in Nigerian context, safety climate factors can best categorize into four; (management commitment, workers involvement, education and training; and belief and perception). But on the other hand, Okolie and Okoye (2013) found that large power distance, low uncertainty avoidance and short term orientation promote unsafe behaviours among construction workers.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living Conditions (2002) notes that Quality of Work Life is a multi-dimensional construct, made up of a number of interrelated factors that need careful consideration to conceptualize and measure. It is associated with job satisfaction, job involvement, motivation, productivity, health, safety and well-being, job security, competence development and balance between work and non-work life. Researchers have affirmed that Quality of Work Life involves wide variety of components or elements that are influenced on the performance of employees, the following elements or components are commonly associated with individual's quality of work life. The task (nature of work), the

physical work environment, social environment within the organization (reflecting notions of a 'well-paid' or 'lowly-paid' job), administrative system and relationship between life on and off the job, remuneration including pay, perks and benefits, job satisfaction and job security, contractual arrangements (for example, permanent or temporary employment), extent of involvement and influence in organizational decision-making, felt fairness' – reward commensurate with level of effort exerted, health, safety and well-being, training and development, organization culture and climate, equity, justice and grievance handling, etc (Saraji & Dargahi, 2006; Fleetwood, 2007; Rethinam & Ismail, 2008; Drobnic, Behan & Prag, 2010; Hosseini, 2010; Koonmee, Singhapakdi, Virakul, & Lee, 2010; Noor, & Abdullah, 2012).

## METHODOLOGY

The study is an exploratory survey. The approach involves the use of structured questionnaires which was considered to be the most appropriate tool to reach the population of the study especially when data required for the study can be obtained by the instrument. The respondents for the study were construction site operatives, covering almost all the trades in the construction industry. The respondents were randomly selected from 80 construction sites across the South East states of Nigeria. The questionnaires were randomly issued to 1200 potential respondents from the selected sites. A total of 861 questionnaires were duly completed, returned and found suitable for analysis, representing a response rate of 71.75%. The questionnaire contains apart the demographic data, thirty six (36) statements; twenty two (22) statements on safety climate factors and another fourteen (14) statements relating to casualization and safety climate of workers on site. These were measured on a five point Likert scale. The data collected were analyzed using tables and simple percentages. Mean Score Index and Standard Deviations were calculated. Both hypotheses were tested with ONE WAY ANOVA to cast inference on the calculated mean scores and standard deviations to determine the significance difference to the level of organizational commitments to safety of workers and the disparity in safety behaviour of casual and permanent workers on construction site at 5% (0.05) significance level.

**Decision:** Reject  $H_0$  if  $F_{\text{calculated}} > F_{\text{critical}}$  at 5% (0.05) significance level, otherwise accept  $H_0$  and conclude.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From Table 1, the calculated F- statistics for all the three safety climate factors (management commitment (**589.145**); workers involvement (**1828.067**); and safety education and training (**292.546**)) are greater than their critical value (**3.85**) at degrees of freedom (df) 1 and 859 and significance difference of 5%. To this end, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) is rejected in all cases. This leads to conclusion that there is significant difference in the organizations' level of safety obligations to casual and permanent construction workers. This is an indication of selective and preferential treatments among the workers due to difference in their job nomenclature and despite working within the same job environment.

**Table 1: ANOVA Table and F Statistics for Organizations' Safety Obligations**

Factor	Source	Sum of Square (SS)	Degree of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Ratio	P value
Management Commitment	Between	697.253	1	697.253	<b>589.145</b>	0.000 Reject H <sub>0</sub>
	Within	1016.635	859	1.184		
	Total	1713.888	860			
Workers Involvement	Between	1073.076	1	1073.076	<b>1828.067</b>	0.000 Reject H <sub>0</sub>
	Within	504.235	859	0.587		
	Total	1577.311	860			
Safety Education and Training	Between	453.680	1	453.680	<b>292.546</b>	0.000 Reject H <sub>0</sub>
	Within	1332.168	859	1.551		
	Total	1785.848	860			

*Degrees of freedom= 1 and 859,  $\alpha= 0.05$ , p value= 0.000*

**Table 2: ANOVA Table and F Statistics for Disparity in Safety Behaviour of Construction Workers**

Source	Sum of Square (SS)	Degree of Freedom (df)	Mean Square (MS)	F-Ratio	P value
Between	8.936	1	8.936	<b>5.055</b>	<b>0.025</b> Reject H <sub>0</sub>
Within	1518.376	859	1.768		
Total	1527.312	860			

*Degrees of freedom= 1 and 859,  $\alpha= 0.05$ , p value= 0.025*

Table 2 shows that H<sub>0</sub> is rejected since F statistics calculated (**5.055**) is greater than F critical (1,859, 0.05) (**3.85**), and p value (**0.025**) >  $\alpha$  (**0.05**), it is then concluded that there is significant disparity in the safety behaviour of casual and permanent construction workers on sites. This disparity in safety behaviours is attributed to the perceived difference in the level organizations' safety obligations to different categories of workers within the same job environment due to their job status. There are differential treatments by the management to casual and permanent workers in terms of benefits and welfare packages, job conditions, salaries, etc. These differences are shown in the level management commitments, workers involvement and safety education and training (see table 1).

### The Implications of the Result

The following implications are very eminent from this result:

- Selective or differential treatment observed between casual and permanent construction workers is as a result of high power distance which makes the casual workers to perceive



safety as non issue thereby limiting their involvement in safety issues (low uncertainty avoidance) and triggered high labour turnover (short term orientation) especially among the casual workers.

- As long as these disparities exist among different categories of construction workers, casual workers who are not favourably disposed will continue to exhibit unsafe behaviours more than their permanent counterparts.
- This disparity will equally create non cohesion among construction workers, increase unsafe practices, lower productivity, lower quality, increase labour turnover and induce conflict of interest.

### **Significance of the Study**

The quest to achieve sustainable construction has continued to attract and herald so much interests and researches across the globe. However, labour issues as regards to relationships between work arrangements and safety climate of construction workers have not been given the desired attentions especially in Nigeria due to the nature and characteristics of the construction industry. Hence, this research has contributed substantially to the existing body of knowledge especially as it has provided an insight into the work arrangements, labour relations, health and safety and occupational behaviour in the Nigerian construction industry. Besides, it serves as strong base for further researches in these areas and therefore will provoke and engender more research interests in the concerned areas.

The result of this study has provided a sound ground for Nigerian government and the National Assembly to take serious actions with respect to re-visiting and amending the existing labour laws in Nigeria in line with the international standards and best practices. Finally, it has provided in terms of suggestion, the construction managers and other construction stakeholders with new labour management strategy that aimed at improved productivity, high quality, reduced labour turnover, less labour dispute, and safe behaviours.

### **CONCLUSION**

Human behaviours have been indentified to be influenced by two dominant factors; ‘nature and nurture’. Since safety is behaviour, it is modelled by perception and perception by environment. A safe work environment depicts a condition where workers are working with their souls and bodies in peace. Nevertheless, this study has appraised and compared the safety behaviours of casual and permanent construction workers with a view to ascertaining if there is any disparity between them, the causes and the implications it has on the construction industry and society as a whole. the study has found that there is significant difference in the level of organizations’ safety obligations to different categories of construction workers in terms of management commitment to safety issues, workers involvement in safety issues concerning them and safety education and training provided and available to worker. However, it established that this perceived differential treatments resulted to significant disparity in the safety behaviour of casual and permanent construction workers on sites. The study further deduced that the observed differential safety commitments and its accompanying disparity in safety behaviours of workers also impact significantly on the performance of the construction industry in terms of non cohesion among the workers, increased unsafe practices, low productivity, low quality, high labour turnover, conflict of interest and high accident rate.

Notwithstanding the reasons adduced by industry players for engaging casual or contract workforce, the current practice is very unhealthy especially when we look at quantum of implications of this kind of employment system in the industry. In view of this, and for survival and sustainability of construction industry, the study recommends a holistic readjustment to close the gaps between casual employers and full time employers in terms of work packages, employment and welfare benefits, basic salary, working condition and other entitlements (equal treatment among workers). It also recommends espousal of “labour loading” as being practiced in New Zealand where the difference between benefits accruing to permanent or full time worker and a casual worker is very minimal within the same work environment. The existing labour law in Nigeria needs to be entirely reviewed to accommodate this trend of employment since no reference is made in that direction in the whole document. To this end, engagement of casual labour will be made less attractive, there will be more cohesion and team spirit among workers, safety will be maximized, accident will be reduced. The industry will record improvement in quality of its products, increments in productivity and the image of the industry will be redeemed.

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